

CPS REFORM WATCH

CPS Reform Watch describes the progress made in implementing the reforms outlined in Governor Janet Napolitano's Action Plan for Reform of Arizona's Child Protection System and included in legislation passed during the 2003 special session. This monthly bulletin also is available on the Department of Economic Security's website at www.de.state.az.us and on the Governor's website at www.governor.state.az.us.

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Arizona Efforts Highlighted at National Child Welfare League of America Conference – Arizona's efforts to improve the system for protecting children were among the main topics during the CWLA national conference, which drew 1,500 child welfare professionals, community leaders, administrators and others concerned with the well-being of children to Washington, D.C., from February 23 to 25. Governor Janet Napolitano was among the keynote speakers on February 24, which also included New York Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton. The Governor shared with participants the new vision for Arizona's child welfare system and efforts she has spearheaded to keep children safe. On February 25, DES Deputy Director Mary Lou Quintana Hanley, Tracy Wareing, the Governor's policy advisor on children's issues, and Kristine Reich from the Arizona State University Child Welfare Training Project presented a workshop that detailed Arizona's efforts to design and implement an integrated system of child protection that includes collaboration with all state agencies serving children and partnering with the community at large.

The challenges facing Arizona's system – including excessive caseloads, insufficient funding for prevention efforts and the need to create care options that allow children to remain safely in their own homes or communities – are issues that child welfare systems nationwide are struggling with. Conference participants from many states expressed their admiration for Arizona's efforts and said they look forward to hearing about Arizona's successes at next year's conference.

Compensation Adjustment, Stipends and Recruitment of Additional CPS Staff – Staff from the Department of Administration (ADOA), DES Office of Personnel Management and the Division of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) have implemented the CPS 10% salary adjustment. The adjustment will be reflected in the March 5, 2004 paycheck and will be retroactive to January 17, 2004.

DCYF is identifying all the positions that qualify under HB 2024 for the 10% Investigator Stipend and determining policy and management changes that would need to occur to implement this stipend. Based on this information, DES will complete a cost analysis of the impact of providing the 10% stipend in FY 2004 and FY 2005 to determine funds available. HB 2024 requires this stipend to be paid "from monies currently available to the department," (Section 46)

CPS caseworkers, program specialists and program supervisors are required to submit verification of Master of Social Work degrees to DCYF in March. The effective date of the advanced degree stipend, and whether the amount will be retroactive, depends on the actual number of staff providing verification compared with the appropriation in HB 2024 for this purpose.

DES has developed draft guidelines and procedures for identifying which offices / workers need a second language in order to perform their jobs. DES has identified organizations that can test the workers who qualify for the language skill stipend. Testing is expected to begin in April 2004.

DES staff have been aggressively recruiting additional case managers. In January and February, 35 case managers were hired. Twenty of these positions were to fill vacancies; 15 of these were new positions funded by HB 2024. This number is on target with the hiring plan established during the special session. The Division plans to hire between 21 and 23 case managers each month through June, which will achieve the goal of 104 additional case managers by the end of the fiscal year.

Provide Adequate Support to Those Who Provide Services – DES has purchased 300 cellular phones for CPS caseworkers through a state contract with Verizon. The phones are being distributed to field staff in the next two weeks. The Department is reviewing its reimbursement policy for workers who prefer to use their personal cellular phones during case management.

The 107 car seats purchased in FY2003 and the 57 car seats purchased so far in FY2004 bring the total number of car seats available in DCYF to 638, almost one per existing caseworker. The Division is working with the District staff to replace old seats and determine how many additional seats are needed to ensure that all case managers have the tools they need to safely transport children in their care.

Jury Trials for Severance Hearings – The Administrative Office of the Courts is modifying its data system to track and monitor jury trials for severance hearings. When the modifications are completed, the system will track various aspects of jury trials including the final disposition of the case and the length of the case compared with a judge-only hearing. The state Attorney General's office is establishing legal instructions for juries in severance cases. To date, there are 34 cases statewide in which parents have requested jury trials; of those, the greatest number (11) come from Pima County. The first case heard before a jury began on Thursday, February 19 in Pima County Superior Court. On Tuesday, February 24, the jury granted a verdict in favor of terminating the parental rights in that case. This frees the child for adoption to a safe, permanent home.

Open Courts Pilot Program – The Open Courts Pilot Program began on September 18, 2003. From that date through the end of October, approximately 200 hearings before Arizona Superior Court Judges Andrew Klein and Sherry Stephens were held in the courtrooms included in the pilot. These covered all stages of dependency cases. Arizona State University is doing an evaluation of the pilot program. The evaluation includes issues such as: participant satisfaction; statistics on the numbers and types of proceedings that were opened; the number of proceedings closed and why; the number of hearings in which a person objected to the opening and why; the number of hearings attended by individuals not parties to the hearing; and, whether and to what extent the opening of a hearing resulted in an adverse effect upon the child or children who were the subject of the proceeding. The interim report on the evaluation, which covers only six weeks of open hearings, will be completed in March. A final report must be submitted to the Governor, legislative leaders and court leaders in November 2005.

In legislation passed during the special session, the Open Court Pilot was expanded to include all Arizona counties. Information on the process and documents used to implement the Maricopa pilot have been shared with some judges in all counties. Staff from the Division of Children, Youth and Families and the Attorney General's office will work with the courts to ensure that the pilots are implemented and evaluated according to the statute.

Residential Drug Treatment – A Request for Proposals for Residential Drug Treatment services included in HB2024 was published on February 2. A pre-proposal conference was held on February 17, which was attended by 11 potential offerors. Proposals are due back to the Division in March. Contracts are expected to be awarded in April, with services beginning shortly thereafter.

Youth Advisory Board – The DES Foster Youth Advisory Board met on February 20 and is developing recommendations for the Governor on the membership and format for the Youth Advisory

Committee. This Committee will provide input on the CPS reform and related issues for youth directly to the Governor on a quarterly basis. At the February 20 meeting, the Board established a preliminary list of issues that includes issues such as increased contact with siblings in foster care and more options to allow youth to remain safely in their homes while family issues are being addressed.

Family Builders Program Re-design – The Division held meetings in Tucson (February 10) and Phoenix (February 12) that included Family Builders clients, providers and DCYF staff to discuss the re-design of the program. Among the issues discussed were investigations, data collection, resources to better assist families, and making it easier for families served by Family Builders to get child care assistance or substance abuse treatment. Significant progress and consensus were made.